

Protecting Your Property from Fire

Dealing with Vegetation and Combustible Materials

Are You At Risk?

If you aren't sure whether your house is at risk from wildfires, check with your local fire marshal, building official, city engineer, or planning and zoning administrator. They can tell you whether you are in a wildfire hazard area. Also, they usually can tell you how to protect yourself and your house and property from wildfires.

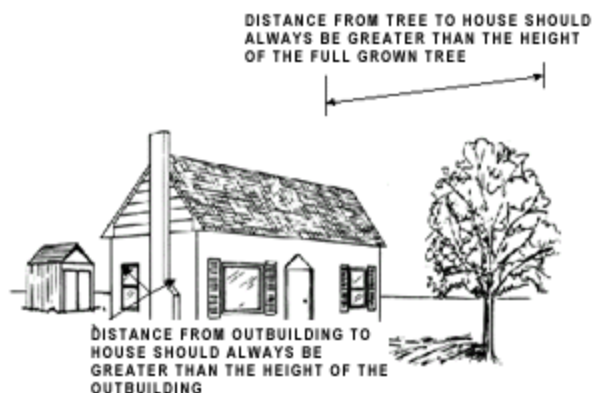
What You Can Do

Wildfire protection can involve a variety of changes to your house and property -- changes that can vary in complexity and cost. You may be able to make some types of changes yourself. But complicated or large-scale changes and those that affect the structure of your house or its electrical wiring and plumbing should be carried out only by a professional contractor licensed to work in your state, county, or city. One example of wildfire protection is removing vegetation, yard debris, and other combustible materials that may be near your house. This is something that many homeowners can probably do on their own.

Remove Vegetation and Combustible Materials

If the area immediately surrounding your house contains trees, shrubs, and other vegetation; yard debris; or other materials that burn easily, your house will be at an increased risk of damage during wildfires and forest fires. These combustible materials provide a path by which fire from nearby areas can reach your house.

As shown in the figure, you should clear the area around your house. Shrubs, brush, woodpiles, and combustible debris should be removed within a radius of 30 feet. The distance between your house and any nearby tree should always be greater than the height of the mature tree or at least 10 feet. Similarly, any outbuildings, such as storage sheds, should be at least as far away as their height.



Tips

Keep these points in mind when you remove vegetation and other combustible materials from around your house:

- Removing large trees near your house can be very dangerous, for both you and your house, and is therefore a job for a skilled contractor.
- Rather than plant shrubs near your house, consider landscaping alternatives such as creating a rock garden.

Estimated Cost

If you hire a contractor to remove a large tree, you can expect to pay about \$300 to \$500. The charge for removing smaller trees and shrubs will be less.

Other Sources of Information

"Five Hot Tips for Homeowners on the Edge," by Herbert McLean, in American Forest, vol. 99, no. 5-6, 1993

Guide to Landscaping for Fire Safety, 2nd. Ed., University of California, 1992

"Firescaping: Ways To Keep Your House and Garden from Going up in Smoke," by Joan Boulton in Horticulture, The Magazine of American Gardening, vol. 69, no. 8, 1991

Protecting Residences from Wildfires: A Guide for Homeowners, Lawmakers, and Planners, Technical Report No. 50, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1981